



# NEW APPLICATIONS

& RECENT RESEARCH

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## What's happening in information services?

### "Let your fingers do the walking"—electronically

Buy-Phone's "electronic yellow pages" service for Los Angeles is answering over 3000 consumer requests per day, on anything from movies to restaurants to auto repair—and the best part? It's all free.

The philosophy was to provide sponsored information paid for by the advertiser, not the consumer.

The computer organizes over 10,000 listings to respond exactly to the caller's request. According to the company, the system had to be easy for computer novices to operate, yet powerful enough to be of value. Four proficiency levels are used, each introducing additional features. Beginning users see only six different categories of listings (restaurants

arranged by price or nationality, movie schedules, plays, . . .). As users advance, they see an expanded list and are shown how to formulate a search. Retrieved listings are arranged by their distance from the user, with the closest shown first. Expert users are able to specify the time and day they want to buy an item and get information only about stores that are open then.

Buy-Phone is now testing expansion to determine how difficult it will be to create similar systems in other cities.

To discover Buy-Phone's service call (213) 474-0270 (300 baud), (213) 470-4679 (1200 baud). Access assistance is available at (213) 474-2220.

### Ships get up-to-the-minute world news

Those at sea are now able to receive the latest international news, thanks to Maripress, a service jointly provided by The Communication Satellite Corporation and Source Telecomputing Corporation.

STC, a subsidiary of The Reader's Digest Association, is best known for The Source, an on-line information and communication service. Maripress is a service provided by Comsat's World Systems Division/Maritime Services.

The Maripress News Digest, which began May 1, includes daily dispatches of weather, sports, business and general news. Information is compiled by STC's electronic newsroom throughout the day and evening and is transmitted to a Comsat earth station. From there, operators transmit the Maripress Digest to ships in the Atlantic and Pacific via an Inmarsat satellite.

Maripress customers are primarily passenger cruise ships, exploratory oil rigs, and private yachts.

Ships subscribing to Maripress will receive the News Digest on their telex machines early each morning, then post printouts on the ship's bulletin boards or attach copies to the ship's newsletter. Because the Maripress Digest is compiled throughout the night, passengers aboard a ship thousands of miles from home may even read about late breaking news and sports scores before their neighbors back home.

### Shopping for DEC products

Digital Equipment Corporation has a computer-based sales service that enables customers to electronically select, review, and purchase products.

The Digital Electronic Store provides customers with the opportunity to review product features, see hardware/software prerequisites and prices, and reference complimentary products and services. Customers will be able to reach the store through a toll-free number 24 hours a day,

seven days a week using a terminal and a 300- or 1200-baud modem.

The service provides a range of payment options, including national credit cards, COD, or DEC charge—an option that offers customers the opportunity to buy on credit from the store.

The Digital Electronic Store features all DEC software and third-party-developed classified software, educational self-paced instruction products, and DEC's referenced service products.

## Service database expands to include tax information

Compu Serve has added the text of 66 Internal Revenue Service taxpayer information publications to its executive and consumer information services. The tax database, a possible solution to the high cost of printing and mailing tax information booklets, covers everything from Individual Retirement Accounts, to business

expenses, to child care. Also included are the most commonly asked tax questions and tax preparation tips. Subscribers can order printed copies of the tax references through Compu Serve using their personal computer.

Information can be retrieved either by asking for the index and then coding in the

publication's identification number or, if the user doesn't know what publication covers the topic, by using key words to search for it.

Those interested can phone Compu Serve in Columbus, Ohio at (614) 457-8600.

## Harvard Business Review goes on line

John Wiley & Sons is providing HBR/Online, the full-text database of the *Harvard Business Review*, through Nexis, the on-line, full text information search service of Mead Data Central. Mead also owns and operates Lexis, a computer-assisted information service for the legal profession.

Subscribers to Nexis will gain immediate access to each current issue of the

*Harvard Business Review* upon publication, as well as electronic entry to HBR/Online's file of past issues dating back to 1976. Abstracts as well as full text are available.

Charges for accessing HBR/Online are included in Nexis's regular service, which costs \$50 per month, \$30 to \$90 per connect hour, plus "search unit" costs.

## Send telegrams using your PC

Western Union's new computer service, called Easy Link, allows computer users to communicate via telex with over 1.5 million businesses. Subscribers to the service receive a personal telex number for transmitting and retrieving messages, including sending mailgrams, telegrams, and cablegrams.

Subscribers can also receive updated reports on stocks, news, commodities,

currency, and other information available through the FYI News Service that supports Easy Link.

The initial charge is \$25 per month, and all other costs are based on computer-time usage. For further information, contact: Jay Castergine, Director, Easy Link Marketing, Western Union, One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458; (201) 825-5110.

## Securities information for clients

With E. F. Hutton's Huttonline, clients with all types of securities accounts have access to account information, such as portfolio positions and market values, cash and margin balances, and open orders. It also shows the client's transaction activity, such as interest and dividend income, buys and sells, interest expense, and deposits. For clients who have asset management or asset reserve accounts, Huttonline shows all checks that have cleared as of the previous day as well as available assets.

Research information, market comments, and other investment information are also available. In addition, clients send and receive electronic mail to and from their account executives. The electronic mail facility is not, however, designed to place orders.

Clients can access Huttonline from anywhere in the US on a personal computer, data terminal, or communicating word processor equipped with a modem and capable of communicating at a speed of 300 baud or 1200 baud (30 or 120 cps). Clients will be able to dial into E. F. Hutton's IBM mainframe computers in New York City over regular telephone lines. Access to Huttonline is also available from many foreign countries. Initially, Huttonline is available to clients seven days a week between 6:00 a.m. and 12:30 a.m. EST.

All Huttonline subscribers are charged a signup fee of \$25 and a monthly service fee of \$17, which includes up to two hours of free use. Additional usage is \$7.50 per hour. Huttonline service fees and required equipment, such as personal computers, modems, and data terminals, may be tax deductible.

## An alternative to the modem

Unlimited amounts of data can be broadcast to an unlimited number of receiving points simultaneously using satellite links, according to Alpha Micro, headquartered in Irvine, California.

Using an AM-1000 system—Alpha Micro's desktop business computer—one of the company's Toronto-based dealers, Murray Desnoyer, successfully broadcast data from Canada to Alpha Micro headquarters. He also demonstrated the concept at computer shows in Canada, using Telesat Canada's Anik B orbiting satellite.

"Satellite transmissions can be received equally well anywhere within the satellite's footprint (receiving area)," Desnoyer said, adding that video data transmission is much faster than conventional methods and can reach remote areas as well as major business centers.

The advantage is that a huge distribution system is already in place through existing satellite networks and other broadcasting facilities. Compared with the cost of what users pay for modems, leased telephone lines, and actual access time, satellite broadcasting is much less expensive.

The approximate rate of data transmission using such a system is about 10M bytes per half-hour. In addition, data broadcasting permits two-way communication of information (if both ends of the link have compatible computers and a satellite receiving dish).

An integral part of the technique is the use of a VCR as a storage backup device. The VCR backup is more desirable than floppy diskettes, according to the company, because it offers greater capacity, lower error rates, and the ability to record up to 100M bytes of data—eight hours worth on a single cassette—without an operator being present.

In addition, data can be broadcast via cable or microwave—any method by which standard television signals are currently transmitted and received.